

MAY 29 1959

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP75-

STATINTL

Two Assessments of the Iraqi Problem

An Intimate Message

By Harry B. Ellis

During his "Meet the Press" television appearance in New York May 17, Israeli Ambassador Abba Eban indicated clearly that Israeli and United States national policies do not always coincide. Specifically the retiring Israeli envoy told a reporter that the problem of Iraq was "not a major world issue... but a simple fight of Nasserism versus the desire to preserve national integrity."

Mr. Eban, who is returning to Israel to take up a political career, also asserted: "The situation in Iraq is not primarily a Communist problem. It is a question of maintaining the separate integrity of states." The envoy went on to say that just as Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and the Sudan had resisted the desire of President Nasser to establish an empire, "so Iraq is now doing. It does not want to become a province of Cairo."

Mr. Eban concluded this line of reasoning by declaring "It is not wise to support President Nasser. Nasserism is the cause of the present crisis."

Reading between the lines of these statements, one sees that Mr. Eban was reflecting a long-held Israeli conviction that President Nasser of the United Arab Republic represents a direct threat to Israel; and that any improvement of Mr. Nasser's position should be opposed by Tel Aviv.

In particular Mr. Eban was reflecting Israeli concern that the United States was planning to join forces with President Nasser in a common fight against communism in the Middle East. In keeping with this concern, Israel consistently has played down the threat of communism in Iraq and instead has stressed the desire of Iraqi Premier Abdel Karim Kassem to steer his country clear of President Nasser.

Lest some Americans accept Mr. Eban's assessment of the Iraqi situation at face value, without realizing the background that produced it, it should be recalled that only a few weeks ago Allen Dulles, Direc-

tor of the Central Intelligence Agency, told a Congressional committee that Iraq constituted the world's chief danger spot. Mr. Dulles' assessment was based on United States intelligence reports, an assessment with which most American observers here on the scene would agree.

Since Israel has one of the most efficient intelligence organizations in the world, this reporter would hazard the opinion that Israeli agents have passed on to Tel Aviv an assessment of the Iraqi situation very similar to that received by Mr. Dulles from American agents. The difference lies in the use to which this information has been put by the United States and Israeli Governments.

To Israel, any consolidation of Mr. Nasser's control over the Arab world is a more immediate and direct danger than the possible take-over of Iraq by Communists. Israeli national interests, therefore, have required that the Iraqi situation be presented primarily as a struggle of General Kassem's regime to remain free of Nasserist control. (This, it should be pointed out, is a line similarly followed by Britain and by certain Middle Eastern minorities, such as some Christian Lebanese.)

To the United States, on the other hand, the paramount danger in the Middle East is that Soviet influence will gain a secure foothold in Iraq from which to work out through neighboring lands. The natural tendency of the United States, therefore, is to align itself with the nationalist current of Arab thought, which opposes communism. Leadership of Arab nationalism today is vested in President Nasser. Hence the recent quiet efforts of Cairo and Washington to normalize their previously strained relations.

When the basic national interests of Israel and the United States are taken into account, it becomes clear why Allen Dulles and Mr. Eban should present assessments of the Iraqi problem which appear directly contradictory.

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